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SUBMARINE CHASER MAKES PORT WITH SAILS OF BED CLOTHING

Engines of No. 28 Break Down, Despite Applications of Salad Oil and Butter When Lubricating Oil Gives Out, and Craft Is in Distress for Thirty Days—Crew on Short Rations.

From the crew of a submarine chaser rigged up bed clothes as sails, their signals of distress failing to bring help after the vessel's engines were disabled and her navigating instruments washed overboard in midocean, and how they piloted the craft through the open sea for a month until they reached the Azores, is graphically described in the report of Alexis Puluhen, the sailing master in command, which has just been made public by the navy department.

The submarine chaser, which was called No. 28, was American built and one of a group turned over to the French government. Manned by French crews the vessels left the Bermudas on January 7, 1918, and soon struck heavy weather. The tugs and chasers found it hard to keep together. In a terrific storm on January 12 the tug convoy was scattered and No. 28 lost sight of her companions.

Heavy seas carried away her lifeboats, davits, boxes of coal and gasoline and ventilators. The engine room was flooded, but the crew managed to start one engine and keep the vessel going. When the weather moderated somewhat No. 28 started out in search of her convoy. She then developed engine trouble, and the shortage of lubricating oil became alarming.

Although the crew worked frantically they could not locate the trouble and the engines finally went "dead." Submarine chaser No. 28 was therefore helpless, and although many signals of distress were sent up nobody seemed to see them.

Reported at the Azores.

When the group of chasers reached the French port No. 28 was reported missing and it was generally believed she had been lost. Then on February 18, much to the surprise of both the French and American navy departments, she was reported at the Azores.

The expedients to which the crew of the vessel resorted in their month at sea are best related in the sailing master's own report:

"The machinists set to work to fix the engines, and on Wednesday, January 16, at midnight, the central engine started up. I set course east. There was nothing in sight. At 3 a. m. we again broke down. At 3:30 a. m. I saw lights of two steamers to port on the horizon, headed east. I showed two red lights at the masthead and signaled to them with the blinker. They did not answer me and continued on their course to the east.

"The boat continued stopped and the machinists kept at the repair of the engines. I kept pumping the bilges where the water reached a height of about 20 inches. The boat made a lot of water from the springing of her beams.

"At ten minutes to 12 a. m. I saw the mast of a scout boat on the horizon to the northwest. Considering my boat to be in a critical condition by reason of the length of time it had been disabled and the near exhaustion of my lubricating oil, I fired a salvo of six shots and hoisted the signal of distress. I obtained no answer and could see nothing more of them a few minutes later. At noon the center engine started up; course east. Nothing in sight. At 1 p. m. a new breakdown of the engine. The chief machinist, Faig-nou, reported to me that the lubricating oil was all gone. Thereupon I used soap suds and several greasy substances to replace the oil, but these gave bad results.

"I then gave all the salad oil and butter for the lubrication of the engines. These latter gave very good results, but were not sufficient. There was about five gallons. At 20 minutes

to six p. m. the engine started up; course east, nothing in sight.

"At half-past eleven p. m. another and last breakdown of the engine and burning out of the dynamo. The chief machinist reported to me that he would not be able to make the engines run any more. The radio would not work. It was impossible for me to call for help. There was nothing left me aboard but several pints of salad oil, which I used only for the lubrication of the auxiliary engine with which I pumped bilges when the state of the sea was such that I could not use the handy-billy (hand pump).

"I found myself, therefore, in complete distress, drifting toward the southeast, at the mercy of the winds and sea, with no exact position. I estimated my position at this time as 36 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude, and 39 degrees west longitude (about 700 miles from the Azores).

Put Crew on Short Rations.

"I remained in this condition until the eighteenth of February without getting help of any kind. I ordered a jury lug rig to be got up, pumping the bilges all the time, putting out and taking in a sea anchor when I thought it well to use it, sparing the drinking water as much as possible, rationing the crew to the lowest possible amount, in view of the probability of a long voyage; putting out and taking in the sails according to the condition of the weather and the direction of the wind, and endeavoring to make head-way east by compass in an effort to reach the Azores. The winds were favorable, blowing generally from the westerly quadrants and changing at intervals from northwest to southwest.

"I sighted four steamers, of which three were very far away and making a course nearly parallel to mine, so that they did not approach very near to me. They were out of sight very quickly and probably did not see me.

"On the 8th of February at half-past nine in the morning, I saw the third steamer about four points to port and crossing our course not far away. The weather was fine, the sea very beautiful. I at once hoisted signals of distress and got out the lifeboat, manned by two volunteers, and ordered it to get in the path of the steamer and speak to him, but when he arrived at a distance of about five miles and was bearing about two points forward of the port beam, the steamer changed course suddenly and put on all steam. I immediately fired a salvo of seven guns at intervals of one minute, in accordance with the rules of distress signals, but he did not answer me and continued to run away. At 15 minutes past eleven he disappeared over the horizon, heading about southwest.

"The conduct of the crew was marvelous throughout the voyage. They retained at all times their habitual calm. They never complained of the smallness of the ration which it was necessary for me to restrict them to, and thereby showed a grand spirit of sacrifice and self-denial.

Steered by Sails.

"On February 18, at half-past six a. m., I saw land one point on the port bow, bearing north 55 degrees east by compass. I headed over and took a sounding from time to time. At eleven a. m. as the ship was going very slowly because of the light breeze from the west that prevailed and the sea was calm, I had the lifeboat hoisted out and manned by three volunteers for the purpose first of reconnoitering the exact nature of the land, and secondly to have a tug sent out. I hoisted at the same time the signal 'Y'—I require a tug. At one p. m. I recognized Fayal to port and Pico to starboard. At half-past two p. m. I saw a tug coming from port and heading for me. At three p. m. I doused sail (one jib, two staysails and one fore-and-aft mainsail). These sails allowed us to steer to a certain extent, and drove us about three knots when we had a fine sea and a good breeze. They were made from tablecloths, sheets, bedspreads and blankets. The weather did not permit of their being used at all times, because they were not very strong.

"At 25 minutes past three the Sin-Mac took me in tow about five miles southwest of Fayal and brought me in to the port of Horta. At half-past four the Sin-Mac took in her tow line and a patrol boat of the port put me alongside the French four-masted bark Cape Horn.

"The coal for the galley was all expended by January 28. The galley fire was made from the wood of the broken mess table and benches. I estimate that I might have held out for 20 days longer, but not more than that, because all the provisions and water would have been gone by that time."

Uncle Eben.

"Some men find fault because dey're too wise," said Uncle Eben, "and others because dey ain't got sense enough."

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